VIII. RELIGION

771 The outstanding feature of Tanala religion is its extreme practicality. All its energies are directed toward acquiring benefits or averting misfortunes. There is no place in it for the mystic, the philosopher or the theologian. Its practices are stereotyped, with minute attention to detail, but most of its beliefs are vague and imperfectly formulated. In the absence of any organized religious authority most of them have remained matters of personal opinion and I found a wide divergence in all but a few main points among even the priests and medicine-men. To make this account intelligible, it has been necessary to introduce a somewhat greater systematization than exists in the native mind.

Beliefs

COSMOLOGY

772 The Tanala believe the earth to be flat, with the sky fitting down over it like a bell glass. There is a wide expanse of sea in which are two islands, Madagascar and another, vaguely known as *Andafy* ("over there"). Some thought *Andafy* was the same as the island of Reunion, of which they had heard. All foreigners, irrespective of race or color, are supposed to come from this other island.

Above the sky, which is thought of as a solid, material shell, there is another world. This is inhabited by the gods and possibly by the souls of the dead. The natives have no beliefs as to its appearance or nature and seem to have no name for it. Below the earth there is a third world, called *Tsimaloumou*. This is a rich and fertile country exactly like the world we live in. Informants were not sure whether the geographic features of our world were reproduced there point for point, but thought not. *Tsimaloumou* is connected with our world by very deep lakes and rivers, and persons who dive deep enough may catch a glimpse of it. It is inhabited by a race called *tsimaloumou maso*, who are like men in all respects except that their noses are set crosswise on their faces. They live in villages, raise rice, etc., like ordinary mortals. The Tanala have no legends of human beings having visited it nor say the souls of the dead do not go there.

The belief in superimposed worlds seems to be universal among the more primitive pagan tribes of Madagascar, as does the belief that the entrance to the lower world is through lakes and rivers.

1: Linton E-5 (1926-27) 1933 FTS Tanala FTS

the Pleiades, and *Telovavy*, three very bright stars in a line, at equal intervals. I could not identify the last and it seems to be applied to more than one grouping. Only one star is named, *Fanjiro*, the planet Venus. 821

The sun and moon were considered as deities or powers and were often included with the other *Zanahary* in invocations. All informants insisted that they knew no creation myth and I believe that their ignorance was genuine. I found a similar lack among their neighbors the Betsileo and can only conclude that, if such myths ever existed, they have now been completely forgotten. [776] 775

CONTROL OF HUMAN AFFAIRS

The core of Tanala religion is the belief that human affairs are subject to a dual control, that of Beings and that of Fate. The two are of nearly equal importance and both good and evil may derive from either. The Beings interfere capriciously and can be influenced by prayer and sacrifice. Fate, on the other hand, is impersonal and mechanistic. It cannot be influenced by prayer or sacrifice, but its workings can be forecast and its direction changed by magical means. This basic dualism is reflected in a clear cut distinction between the activities of the priest and those of the *ombiasy* ("medicine-man"). The former deals only with the Beings, especially the ancestral spirits, while the latter specializes in the detection and control of Fate and has little to do with the Beings. 771●

The interrelation between the Beings and Fate has never been clearly formulated by the natives. Priests and *ombiasy* whom I interrogated agreed that both derived their powers from the same source, *Zanahary*. It was *Zanahary* or the *Zanahary* (plural) who fixed the destiny of the individual at birth. Whether the ancestral spirits had any hand in shaping it was uncertain, but the majority thought not. In changing destiny *Zanahary* was appealed to, but in a formal fashion, the real efficacy lying in the magical acts accompanying the invocation. Apparently there was a feeling that the ancestral spirits could modify the destiny in minor details, but could not change it as a whole. The whole matter was very hazy in the minds of even the best instructed natives and it was clear that they had not thought about it until I questioned them. 776

Beings are believed to be of three sorts, a Deity or Deities, Non-Human Spirits, and Spirits of the Dead. The Deity or Deities are conceived of as first causes and sources of the power exercised by Beings of the other two categories. They are remote and shadowy